California Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology

The Children's Health Act of 2000 directed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish regional centers for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and other developmental disabilities (DDs). CDC is now funding **Centers for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDREs)** in California, Colorado, Maryland, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. In Georgia, CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at CDC leads the sixth CADDRE program. The three goals of these centers are to conduct center-initiated special studies, to design and conduct a multisite study of causes and risk factors for ASDs, and to disseminate findings to increase public health awareness. For information about CADDRE, please visit the CDC website at: http://www.cdc.gov/caddre.

The California Department of Public Health houses the CADDRE program in California. Studies are conducted throughout the state. The California center focuses on hree major project areas:

Study to Explore Early Development (SEED)

In this study, the center will work with other CADDRE programs to find causes of ASDs or factors that make it more likely that a child will have an ASD. Families who take part in SEED will answer survey questions and provide biological samples, children will be given developmental tests and physical examinations, and staff will look at medical records. Approximately 2700 children 2 through 5 years of age and their parents are expected to participate in this multisite study. Children with an ASD will be compared with a random sample of children from the general population, and a sample of children with other neurodevelopmental problems. Children born and living in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties are eligible for the SEED study in California.

Special Studies

The California center is particularly interested in identifying biomarkers for early identification of children with ASDs and in investigating potential environmental risk factors for ASDs. Studies are in place to evaluate early biomarkers in newborn blood specimens to identify very young children at high risk for an ASD and better understand biologic pathways. Other studies will evaluate demographic and perinatal factors that might be associated with ASDs and will link autism data to environmental databases to find clues about possible environmental contributions to autism in some children.

In 2006, California CADDRE was awarded a planning grant to evaluate the feasibility of and to design a program for monitoring ASDs in children younger than 4 years of age. Extensive surveys have been conducted with medical sources, developmental screening programs, and educational resources to determine how best to conduct ASD monitoring in these young children for whom a definitive diagnosis might not yet have been established. A plan for Monitoring Early Childhood Autism (MECA) in Santa Clara County has been submitted to CDC for review and possible funding.

Outreach and Education

We at the California center are committed to providing information about ASD to families and promoting autism awareness. We share what is learned from our studies through our yearly newsletter, local and national conferences, scientific publications, and our website. We have also produced an autism parent handbook that is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Over 30,000 copies have been distributed to parents and providers throughout California.

For further information, please contact: California CADDRE, California Department of Public Health, 850 Marina Bay Parkway, Bldg P, 3rd Fl., School of Public Health, Richmond, CA 94804, Tel: (510) 620-3700, Fax: (510) 620-3720, Email: autism@cdph.ca.govu, www.ehib.org/autism